

GMO Contamination of the Food Chain. Devastating Health Impacts. EU Food Safety Regulators Turn “A Blind Eye”

Regulator’s approach to GMO contamination: “Don’t look, don’t find”

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“Corporations as the dominant institution shaped by capitalist patriarchy thrive on eco-apartheid. They thrive on the Cartesian legacy of dualism which puts nature against humans. It defines nature as female and passively subjugated. Corporatocentrism is thus also androcentric – a patriarchal construction. The false universalism of man as conqueror and owner of the Earth has led to the technological hubris of geo-engineering, genetic engineering, and nuclear energy. It has led to the ethical outrage of owning life forms through patents, water through privatization, the air through carbon trading. It is leading to appropriation of the biodiversity that serves the poor.” Vandana Shiva[1]

The protection of biodiversity involves maintaining the ability of organisms to develop under their evolved dispositions and naturally established restrictions and to participate in further evolutionary processes.

We seek to protect organisms and ecosystems from persistent chemical substances. We should also protect them from the uncontrolled spread of synthetic and genetically engineered organisms because these organisms have a capacity to self-replicate, evolve and interact with other organisms in unpredictable ways and thereby represent a threat to ecological systems and their resilience [2].

GMO maize, rice, cotton and oilseed rape have uncontrollably spread in regions and countries such as the US and Canada, Central America, Japan, China, Australia and Europe. In many cases, GMOs have escaped far beyond the fields into the environment and have even moved into populations of wild relatives [3].

Commercial cultivation and experimental field trials are responsible for much of this contamination. However, losses from the import and transport of grains for food and feed production are also an important source of uncontrolled dispersal.

German-based independent watchdog/research body Testbiotech is accusing the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) of deliberately downplaying the risks of an uncontrolled spread of genetically modified oilseed rape. The accusation stems from Monsanto having filed an application for the import into the EU of viable transgenic oilseed rape MON88302 kernels, which are to be processed to oil and feed in Europe. Similar rape plants have already spread far beyond the fields in various regions of the world, for example along transport routes.

The EFSA is actually assuming that seeds will be lost during transport within the EU and that the genetically engineered plants will grow in the environment. Despite this assumption, it has concluded that the risk of transgenes spreading into the environment is low. Christoph Then of Testbiotech says:

“Experience from importing countries such as Japan shows that EFSA’s assumption is wrong. Even though officially no genetically engineered oilseed rape is grown in Japan, it can be found everywhere alongside the roads, ports and factories, where it is transported or processed. Once the transgenic plants become feral, they might propagate in the environment without detection for many years. If these plants cause economic or environmental damage, it may be too late for counter-measures if it becomes impossible to withdraw them from the environment.”

Testbiotech notes that Europe is a centre of biological diversity for oilseed rape and related species and argues that transgenic oilseed rape will be able to spread genetic material by crossing with wild relatives. Plant pollen can be carried over many kilometers by wind or insects. Seeds can be transported via the faeces of deer without losing the ability to germinate.

Although Monsanto presented specific data on the viability of pollen and seeds of MON88302, these were rejected by EFSA because the methodology used in the investigations was seriously flawed. The authority failed to ask for further assessments.

Testbiotech is not only accusing EFSA of declaring oilseed rape MON88302 to be safe, even though there is no data to prove this claim, but is also accusing it of serious errors in the assessment of health risks. According to Monsanto, MON88302 was especially designed to withstand even higher dosages and even more frequent applications of glyphosate herbicides (brands such as Roundup). But the EFSA neither took into account the level of residues in the crop, nor were any feeding studies required.

Christoph Then:

“EFSA’s don’t-look-don’t-find approach is nothing more than a system to avoid a more detailed risk assessment of products derived from genetically engineered plants. By claiming that the Monsanto oilseed rape is safe in spite of the absence of reliable data, the authority is putting human and animal health as well as the integrity of the environment at risk.”

It wouldn’t be the first time. Regulatory bodies have been too willing to give the nod to biotech companies and their products without seeking to independently verify industry claims or adopt a precautionary approach.

Last year, the EFSA was found to be riddled with serious conflicts of interests, with over half of the 209 scientists sitting on its panels having direct or indirect links to the industries they are meant to regulate [4]. It’s most glaring failure involves the EU-wide release of glyphosate onto the commercial market back in 2002, with ordinary people now paying the cost for such negligence in terms of them being slowly but steadily poisoned [5].

Testbiotech calls on the EU Commission and the German Government to reject EFSA’s risk assessment and prevent the import of viable oilseed rape kernels into the EU.

Notes

[1]

<http://www.spaziofilosofico.it/numero-07/2959/economy-revisited-will-green-be-the-colour-of-money-or-life/>

[2] <http://www.stop-the-spread-of-transgenes.org/?q=node/2>

[3] <http://www.testbiotech.org/en/node/948>

[4] http://corporateeurope.org/sites/default/files/attachments/unhappy_meal_report_23_10_2013.pdf

[5]

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/monsantos-roundup-herbicide-and-regulators-with-something-to-hide/5389977>

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